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ABSTRACT

To examine the current status of speech and theatre departments in small (1000 to 3000 students) U.S. liberal arts colleges, 24 colleges in the Midwest and Great Lakes areas were surveyed. The survey revealed that the colleges organized speech and theatre in one of four ways; they either (1) combined departments, (2) split the two into separate departments, (3) subsumed both under a third department, or (4) had either a speech or a theatre department. Survey findings indicated that reasons for departmental splits included fighting between the divisions and administrative pressure, while combined departments were the product, in part, either of strong departmental conviction that both speech and theatre are part of communication or of a fear that division would weaken one or both parts of the department. The survey also revealed that in some cases separation strengthened each branch and that some combination departments appeared to be two departments under one head. The lack of consistency among college programs is indicated by the great number of names given to college speech communication departments. (MM)

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DIRECTIONS

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DIRECTIONS

Here we are at the SCA Convention, celebrating Speech Communication and all it stands for. But a quick question occurs. What does it stand for? In an attempt to discover what selected small, liberal arts colleges are doing in their communication and theatre departments, evidence has been produced which indicates, once again, that we don't agree on several fundamental educational positions.

This paper does not seek to judge. Rather it seeks to answer certain relevant questions about current trends in departmental content, philosophy and structure of the disciplines of speech communication and theatre in small (1000 to 3000 students) liberal arts colleges.

Hopefully the answers to the proposed questions will be valuable to educators in these disciplines as they analyze their own departments and determine future courses of action.

As a matter of historic record, the study of speech and theatre in higher education began in the English and Classics departments across the United States in the latter part of the 19th century. Most commonly the word elocution described what passed for speech training then; theatre frequently consisted of Greek and Roman plays directed by a diligent professor of the Classics. Early in the 20th century, movements began to separate these studies from English and Classics. By the beginning of the third decade of this century, departments of Speech were not uncommon in colleges and universities. As a usual thing,

such a department embraced whatever theatre training occurred in the institution. Many theatre programs within this structure were taught and directed by one person.

Recent years have seen further developments: (1) the discipline of theatre separating from speech; and (2) the word communication commonly used in conjunction with speech to refine meaning - although as one colleague said, "This is a redundancy!".

The focus in this investigation will be on 24 colleges within two college Consortiums: the Great Lakes College Association and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest. Questions to be answered will include the following:

1. How many sample colleges originally had combination departments?
2. How many sample colleges have retained combination departments?
3. If they have retained combinations, are both entities given equal weight or is a department a combination in name only?
4. If a division has occurred, have the two entities of the original department maintained equal strength in matters of faculty size and training, majors, campus image, etc.?
5. What are the philosophical/practical considerations which resulted in the division if such was the case?
6. What are the philosophical/practical considerations which have allowed the combinations to be retained?

Factors of value emerging from this inquirey can include:

1. Statistical conclusions which in and of themselves will be of interest to speech/theatre educators;
2. Specific information will become available regarding benefits and disadvantages of department actions as described above. This information will enable educators to assess their own departmental situations and make judgements relative to current situations and/or future decisions.

The colleges to be considered are the following: Albion, Antiock, De Pauw, Earlham, Hope, Kalamazoo, Kenyon, Oberlin, Ohio Weslyan, Wabash and Wooster in the GLCA: Beloit, Carlton, Colorado, Coe, Cornell, Grinnell, Knox, Lawrence, Macalester, Monmoth, Ripon and St. Olafs in the ACM. The approximate number of students these colleges serve is 34,304. The average size of the GLCA schools is 1,458; of the ACM colleges, 1,395.[1]

Why should these colleges be focused on? An interview with Dr. Neil Wylie, Vice President of the GLCA and former faculty member at Cornell College gives substance to their importance. According to Dr. Wylie, they all have significant endowments. They are well established institutions. Many, long ago, celebrated their centennials. Their collective impact is equal to a major university. The quality of their faculties is outstanding - each has a high proportion of PH. D.'s. They tend to be selective in their admissions policies; their graduates are frequently very influencial in our nation and world.[2] So it naturally follows that what they do in academic departments is important, speech and theatre not excepted!

When the study of speech began to be recognized as a legitimate academic concern, many of these colleges were in the vanguard. For instance, at Albion College in Michigan, a department of Speech was created in 1919 under the leadership of Charles Wolbert of the Wolbert

and Weaver text, one of the earliest in the discipline. In 1921 the Albion department added a theatre curriculum, taught by one person. Through the years the department has had outstanding faculty and graduates. Henry Ewbank, Kenneth Hance, Karl Robinson and Thorrel Fest are examples of faculty who have made great contributions to the field. Outstanding graduates include Wallace Bacon and Wendell Cole.[3]

Thus is Albion typical of the evolution and strength of speech and theatre in many small, midwestern liberal arts colleges. What they do currently and have done in the past is not without significance and influence nationally.

Of importance in this study is a comparison of the current status of speech/theatre departments in the two consortiums. From examination, it would appear that the GLCA colleges (Michigan, Indiana, Ohio) have retained more equal strength between the two disciplines than has the AMC (Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Colorado) which seems to emphasize theatre programs above speech communication. It is safe to conclude, however, that the majority of the 24 colleges began with departments of speech as described in the Albion case, whatever is now current.

To be specific, the following statistics characterize GLCA schools: 3 have combination departments; 7 have both speech communication and theatre departments; and 2 have only theatre departments. In the AMC, 5 colleges have combination departments, 1 has only a speech communication department, 5 have only theatre departments and 1 has both speech and theatre within the English department.[4]

What educational rationales/philosophies have given rise to these diversities of solutions relative to two disciplines once assumed to belong together? Since it is truly impossible to consider each of the

24 colleges for answers, 4 from each of the consortiums have been chosen to profile in some detail. They will surely serve to indicate, generally, the reasoning behind action and the results of such action of the departments represented in the two consortiums.

In the GLCA, the 4 colleges chosen to discuss are DePauw University, Hope College, Kalamazoo College and Ohio Weslyan University. Let us look first at the 2 which have retained combination departments.

DePauw, located in Greencastle, Indiana, has outstanding forensic and theatre programs as well as an enviable curriculum in speech and theatre. The original department was established in 1907 and known as Public Speaking. Eventually the study of theatre was added to the curriculum. The dual nature of the department has never been seriously challenged from either inside or outside the department. The view has been constant that the name Communication Arts and Sciences is reflective of the rationale that theatre as well as public address is a form of communication. Says a staff member, "communication is aesthetic as well as logical. Theatre is a way of studying the aesthetic side . . . in a very real way, theatre is debate and debate is theatre."[5]

The staff in the combination department at DePauw numbers 6 1/3 members. The majors are quite evenly divided between the areas of communication taught in the department. The department does not label the majors by area and resists efforts of the major to label: all are Communication Arts and Science majors, regardless of the area of communication each studies.

Continuing with the combination departments, Kalamazoo College at Kalamazoo, Michigan has a department of Theatre and Communication Arts. The current department has evolved from the early and traditional Speech department, established in the late teens-early 20's, to one called Theatre Arts to its present title.

The department has 4 full time faculty members. The theatre aspect of the department is extremely healthy. There are numerous courses for the major and other interested students. The department mounts 3 major productions each year and has an outstanding summer theatre program. Each term there are a good many experimental, student directed shows.

Communication Arts is less strong. There is a beginning speech course, one in persuasion and a few general media courses. So here we find a "combination" department which stresses one discipline over the other.

The Kalamazoo staff member interviewed indicated that fluxuation in graduation requirements has affected the content of the department. For instance, when graduation requirements for speech were discontinued, speech courses suffered. When the faculty voted in a Fine Arts requirement, theatre courses flourished. When speech courses were defined as part of Fine Arts, such courses began to be healthy again. In addition, it was suggested that sometimes decisions on curriculum content have depended on the specific interests of a given staff.[6]

Now let us examine two departments in which divisions have occurred. Hope College in Holland, Michigan has two departments where one originally existed. The early department, established in the 1930's, was known as Speech. In 1947 a staff person was added in theatre. Through the years different paths were taken by the two entities of the department. Finally the only common ground left was Oral Interpretation, not in strong enough position to hold the parts together. Hope's president in the late 1960's supported the idea of two departments. Those conditions and personality clashes between the speech and theatre factions of the department created the present situation which has existed since 1969.

Both departments are healthy. Communication has 4 full time staff members as well as some part time staff. Their majors are given a graduate school focus and there is a good program in media. The department of Theatre has a staff of 5 and excellent physical facilities. It produces a popular summer theatre program as well as the traditional number during the academic year. The theatre curriculum is a thorough one.[7]

Indeed, it can be said that both departments are alive and well, doing a better job for the Hope student than the single department did.

As at Hope College, Ohio Weslyan University in Delaware, Ohio, had a department of Speech which included theatre. In 1972, the department split. There was a strong feeling that the disciplines did not belong together - that theatre is truly a fine art and communication is a social science. At the time of the division, there was consideration of joining the study of journalism with communication; apparently there were political problems and the merger never occurred.

Since the division of departments, theatre seems most pleased. In communication there is some concern that the division was unwise.[7A] Nevertheless, statistics indicate both departments are in good shape. Each department has 3 staff members and majors abound in each. Theatre has recently added Dance to its curriculum and a 4th staff member teaches those courses.

As one Ohio Weslyan staff member expressed it, "the college has followed the leadership of the two national organizations - ATA and SCA" in the manner in which it looks at disciplines once considered strongly related.[8]

Now let us turn to consideration of colleges in the ACM. For purposes of this study, Macalester, St. Olafs, Lawrence and Beloit have been chosen. Two combination departments will be discussed first.

Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota has a department of Speech Communication and Dramatic Arts. The two areas have remained together since the inception of the department because there is a definite belief that the two disciplines belong together. The reasoning behind this belief is very similar to the one noted for DePauw University. Furthermore, it is felt that a split would likely weaken both entities rather than create advantages.

Each discipline is taught by 3 staff members. They appear to be equal in reputation and very healthy. Students may major in theatre, in public adress or choose a general major. This major arrangement suggests two departments operating under one administrative head. Yet it must be emphasized that commonality of the two disciplines is a philosophical reality for most of the staff. Reflecting on the Macalester situation, one staff member suggested in an interview that once two senior members of the staff retire, a challenge to the combination may well occur since there are younger staff members who see no clear reason why the two disciplines should be together.[9]

Another example of a combination department in the ACM is St. Olafs College in Northfield, Minnesota. Its name is Speech/Theatre. The department was founded in 1947. The two disciplines remain together because there is strong staff support for the notion of commonality between them. This philosophy is actively recognized in recruitment of new staff. If a candidate does not subscribe to this rationale, he is not considered.

The St Olafs department is very healthy. There are 7 staff members and the department boasts between 75-87 majors. (It should be observed that St. Olafs is the largest of the colleges in the two consortiums.) Distinction between types of majors (Public Address, General, Theatre

and Interpretation) is made by calling these areas of study "concentrations' The department is within the Division of Fine Arts within the college.[10]

The St. Olafs staff member interviewed mentioned the fact that in the early day of the ACM consortium (about 1957) a Forensics contest was attempted among the member colleges but it failed ultimately because there was little curricular support for such activity.[11]

Turning away from combination departments, let us look at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. Here is a Theatre department with a long-standing tradition. It was established in 1928 and continues to be a strong department with 40 majors even though cutbacks have reduced the staff size from 4 to 2. Its title is Theatre and Drama.

The 2 man staff mounts 4 major productions a year in addition to 6 or more student directed productions. The majority of Lawrence theatre major graduates go into professional theatre. Placement, except for acting, has been highly successful.

To the knowledge of the staff member interviewed, there has never been a Speech department, unlike other colleges in this survey. Furthermore, currently there is no agitation for one. However, the need is felt, according to the interviewee. When secondary certificates are awarded to graduates seeking teaching positions, they are frequently given responsibility to teach speech/communication and have no preparation whatsoever.[12]

Oral Interpretation, the common link between theatre and speech is no longer taught. A beleagered staff simply cannot handle it. Before staff cuts, OI was a very popular course.

The final college to be examined in this paper is Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin. A Speech department was established there in 1946. This evolved to Speech and Dramatic Arts in the mid 1960's with a strong emphasis on theatre. Currently, Beloit has a department

of Performing Arts which includes music, dance and theatre. Under this organization the 2 member staff in theatre mounts 4 major stage productions each year and, in addition, there are student directed workshop shows. The curriculum contains traditional theatre courses.

Because there is a sense of real need for courses in communication, the staff members in theatre also teach a limited curriculum in that area. These courses, along with the theatre courses are listed as Fine Arts courses in the college catalog. The staff member interviewed indicated a growing student interest in communication as a discipline which he hopes will result in the establishment of a recognized department.[13]

What conclusions can be formed from this study? The following appear to evolve without effort:

1. Splits in departments have occurred when:
   a. department members haven't been convinced that the 2 disciplines belong together;
   b. there has been infighting between the 2 divisions within a department;
   c. forces outside the department (administrative) have encouraged the split;
   d. recruitment policies have been lax in seeking new staff with "combination" conviction; and
   e. SCA and ATA directions have been interpreted to indicate a national trend toward separation.
2. Departments have remained in combination because:
   a. there has been a real conviction on the part of the department that speech and theatre are both communication;
   b. recruitment policies have constantly reinforced this notion; and
   c. there has been a fear that a division could weaken or destroy one or both parts of the department.
3. In some cases where division has occurred, both entities are stronger than when they were one.
4. Some combinations are really combinations in name only, featuring one of the disciplines far more strongly than the other.

5. In some cases where there is only one discipline, there is a strong feeling that the other entity should be taught. The results of this are:
   a. minimal "other" courses are pushed onto already crowded curricula and over-worked staff; and
   b. agitation is beginning to establish a second department because of student interest and need.
6. Some combination departments appear to be two departments under one administrative head.
7. College graduation requirements sometimes dictate content and emphasis in a department.
8. It appears, sometimes, the direction a department takes depends on who is on the staff and how determined he is that his major interest be served. This is especially true when no developed philosophy is guiding the department.

What can one make of these conclusions? As was mentioned in the introduction to this paper we try but we lack consistancy. Good or bad? You're to be the judge. Yet, perhaps such diversity tends to weaken our potential strength.

One final comment. We go wild over departmental titles! It's very nearly true that no two are alike. Here is the list:

Speech Communication Arts
Speech and Drama
Speech/Theatre
English, Speech and Theatre
Communication Arts and Sciences
Theatre Arts and Speech
Speech Communication and Theatre
Communication Studies
Inter-Arts Program
Speech Communication
Theatre and Drama
Speech
Theatre Art

Studies in Theatre Arts
Drama and Dance
Theatre and Speech
Theatre and Speech Communication
Speech Communication and Dramatic Arts
Communication
Drama
Communications

In this recital, only one title appears more than once: Theatre is used by 2 departments. Such a situation must be confusing to many.

What do we stand for?

Footnotes

1. Catalogs of the 24 colleges used in the survey.

2. Interview with Dr. Neil Wylie, Vice President, Great Lakes College Association, Ann Arbor, Michigan , August 10, 1982

3. Studies and observations made by the writer

4. Catalogs as in Footnote 1.

5. Interview with Robert O. Weiss, Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana, August 2, 1982.

6. Interview with Nelda Balch, Professor Emerita of Theatre and Communication Arts, Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, Michigan, August 3 and 17, 1982.

7. Interview with Joe MacDoniels, Chairman and Assistant Professor of Communication, Hope College, Holland, Michigan, August 3, 1982.

7A. In Fall of 1982, Ohio Weslyan eliminated department.

8. Interview with Robert Crosby, Professor of Theatre, Ohio Weslyan University, Delaware, Ohio, August 4, 1982.

9. Interview with Geln Wilson, Professor of Speech Communication and Dramatic Arts, Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota, August 4, 1982

10. Interview with Kenneth Wilkens, Professor of Speech, St. Olafs College, Northfield, Minnesota, August 5, 1982

11. Interview with Wilkens

12. Interview with Fred Gaines, Chairman and Assistant Professor of Theatre and Drama, Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin, August 10, 1982

13. Interview with Elmer Barraclough, Associate Professor of Performing Arts, Beloit College, Beloit, Wisconsin, August 9, 1982